

MARIPOLDATA Reading Group

Science-Policy Interfaces in United Nations negotiations

28.10.2020

Guest Speaker: Christine Gaebel, iAtlantic & ATLAS Policy Project Manager at the University of Edinburgh, presenting her recent paper *Recognising Stakeholder Conflict and Encouraging Consensus of ‘Science-Based Management’ Approaches for Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)* (Gaebel et al., 2020).

Context:

Currently, the UN is negotiating a new legally binding agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. Oftentimes, there is the call for the use of “best available science” in decision-making.

- How can we make sense of science-policy interfaces in international negotiations, such as the BBNJ negotiations?
- How are different stakeholders in BBNJ perceiving the science-policy interfaces?

The two readings on the topic of science-policy interfaces in international negotiations offer insights on 1) theoretical background of combining insights from International Relations and Science and Technology Studies to study science-policy interrelations and 2) the concrete example of the BBNJ negotiations and different stakeholder perspectives.

Readings for this session:

When does Science matter? International Relations Meets Science and Technology Studies (Lidskog & Sundqvist 2015) to provide some background knowledge on science-policy interfaces in international negotiations.

Recognising Stakeholder Conflict and Encouraging Consensus of ‘Science-Based Management’ Approaches for Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) (Gaebel et al., 2020).

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Ina Tessnow- von Wysocki, October 2020



1. When does Science matter?

Reading 1. When does Science matter? International Relations Meets Science and Technology Studies (Lidskog & Sundqvist 2015)

Overview:

Ofentimes we hear the call for “science-based” approaches, or the use of “best available science” to guide decision-making. How can we study this interface in an international negotiation process, such as the UN negotiation for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction?

There are diverging understandings of how, when, and under what conditions science influences policy, and therefore also on how the interplay between science and policy should be best organized.

The authors provide a brief and clear overview of main insights from different school of thought on the science-policy interrelations and role of science in international policy-making.

<u>International Relations</u>		<u>Science and Technology Studies</u>
Liberal institutionalism (Regime Theory)	Constructivism (Epistemic Communities)	Concepts of coproduction, stage management, civic epistemologies
Science has no independent role relative to state interests	Emphasis on the importance of science, and in particular consensus-based knowledge in policy-making	Science and policy are understood as intertwined Science-policy relationship characterized as a process of coproduction , meaning that policy influences the production and stabilization of knowledge, while knowledge simultaneously supports and justifies policy
Science is understood as a resource that nation-states can use in their negotiations concerning international agreements		Stage management , as a form to study how actors, in practice, address the coproduction of science and policy : Backstage management refers to the process of knowledge production, which is uncertain, controversial, and risky; while in front-stage management, science becomes explicit and public, and is often portrayed as certain and independent of political considerations

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<p>knowledge is but one of many resources that a state can use when bargaining over international cooperation</p>		<p>Sheila Jasanoff's concept of civic epistemologies: Accounting for differences in assessing the rationality and robustness of knowledge claims</p>
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Epistemic communities: Knowledge-based, transnational networks of professionals holding political power through cognitive authority. They evolve and can successfully change the understanding of an environmental issue, thereby persuading policy makers to take action. Expert knowledge becomes an important explanatory factor for international cooperation, which implies that ideas can change a state's conception of its interests. However, it is the existence of an epistemic community as an agent that makes "speaking truth to power" possible.

Based on this approach, we can describe the role of science in policy formation as involving a **three-step process**: separate science from policy; build consensual knowledge; and connect knowledge to policy.

Haas and Stevens (1992) argue that to be influential...

1. Scientific knowledge should be **separated from the policy process**.
2. **Consensus-based** (then legitimate and credible)
3. Knowledge has to be **usable**

There are thus, quite **significant differences between the approaches** of International Relations scholars and Science and Technology (STS) Scholars. Whereas Haas and Stevens suggest that isolation makes scientific actors stronger, STS scholars claim the opposite: scientists can only be influential by building networks with other actors, and these are to be built in parallel with the development of scientific arguments. In the constructivist perspective of International Relations, science should be separated from policy in the beginning and speak as "one voice", as such, with consensus on scientific issues: "speaking truth to power". In contrast, researchers within the field of STS state that science is not as pure as it claims to be and that what makes science important is that it is messy, impure, and political. In this regard, there is no necessity for separation of science and policy.

Overall, the authors emphasise the **value in combining insights from IR and STS** for making sense of how science-policy interrelations unfold. STS research can be used to elaborate upon and deepen IR research regarding how and when science connects to policy. In this way, STS can supplement and deepen IR discussions on the use of science in policy.

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2. BBNJ Science-Policy Interfaces

Text 2: *Recognising Stakeholder Conflict and Encouraging Consensus of ‘Science-Based Management’ Approaches for Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)* (Gaebel et al., 2020).

3. Discussion

Christine Gaebel and her co-authors researched the stakeholder perspectives of science-based management approaches in the case of the ongoing BBNJ negotiations. Interviews with BBNJ stakeholders, namely people directly involved with the negotiations or research of BBNJ or work in an industry directly involved in BBNJ. While the results cannot be generalized, they provide a snapshot of stakeholder perceptions in the BBNJ process.

BBNJ Stakeholders and their views on science

While all BBNJ stakeholders are valuing science, there seem to be different definitions of what the “best available science and knowledge” is and therefore, what forms of knowledge and in what way such should be included into decision-making in the BBNJ process. This shows the diverse forms of knowledge systems and the various perceptions that will need to be brought together to inform decisions in BBNJ for governing the global commons. For Christine Gaebel, science does not only include marine science or ocean science, but rather also community-based knowledge.

Data generation by non-state actors

Data on the ocean, marine species, impacts of activities, changing marine environments, to name a few, are already being gathered by a number of actors, including non-state actors. Christine Gaebel indeed sees a value in including non-state actors, such as environmental non-governmental organisations or the business sector into data collection and sharing. There are many different kinds of data necessary to collect and industry vessels are already going to various areas of the ocean in their normal capacities. Therefore it would be useful to have data generated by such actors and contribute to a larger database.

The right science for BBNJ

The multiple stakeholders in BBNJ value science and different knowledge systems differently. In the BBNJ negotiations, it remains to be seen which forms of knowledge will the agreement will be based on, who will be identified as experts in this regard and to what extent a potential Scientific and Technical Body will be provided with powers to influence policy-making in these areas that belong to all. Another issue is the level to which decisions should be based exclusively on science and if other values are to be allowed to guide

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policy, such as normative, moral claims. The group named and discussed the case of the International Whaling Commission, in which the Scientific Committee and the Technical Committee justified commercial whaling on scientific grounds as “sustainable”, without addressing moral arguments that opposed whaling per se. The political body, however, nevertheless voted in favor of the whales, despite opposition from the scientific body, arguing that whales could be killed¹. This encourages thoughts on science-policy interrelations and to what extent moral, normative human norms play a role in international policy settings.

Institutional Setting

Discussion within the group also surrounded other factors, including institutional settings and rules of procedure of the body to the regime in influencing the role of scientific uptake. This would particularly be important to consider when it comes to a potential Scientific and Technical Body to provide science input. The institutional setting plays a significant role in the power of scientific and technical bodies and can lead to a politicization. It is therefore particularly interesting to research options for the newly to be created Scientific and Technical Body for BBNJ.

The role of Social Media

Social media can play a significant role in bringing people into the conversation that are unaware of the BBNJ negotiations. In the climate change and biodiversity fields social media also served to put pressure on policy-makers. Analyses of twitter posts during negotiations guard valuable future research potential in this regard.

We are looking forward to the upcoming Reading Group Session and discussions!

¹ See: A. W. Harris, The Best Scientific Evidence Available: The Whaling Moratorium and Divergent Interpretations of Science, 29 Wm. & Mary Envtl. L. & Pol'y Rev. 375 (2005), <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmelpr/vol29/iss2/4>. Retrieved from: <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1128&context=wmelpr> .
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